



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., John F. Scott, Paulann H. Sheets, James L. Streeter, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, November 14, 2006

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING - REVISED

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Scott and Councilor Sheets

Members Absent: Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Streeter and Councilor Wright

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2006-0283 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of October 24, 2006 are hereby accepted and approved.

Tabled

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2003-0045 Economic/Strategic Plan Update

Discussed

Barbara Strother, Mike Murphy and Matt Davis (the newly hired Manager of Planning and Development Services) were present to provide an overview for the Council of the recently completed Economic/Strategic Plan. Mr. Murphy noted that the Town's 2002 POCD recommended development of an economic/strategic plan. Ms. Strother reviewed the RFQ process and firm selected as well as the Steering Committee/public meeting process. Mr. Davis distributed an executive summary and project list from the plan. Mr. Murphy reviewed highlights of the executive summary. The project list was developed through a ranking system outlined in the plan. Mr. Murphy reviewed current activity on the projects listed and next steps. Discussion followed on the plan's recommendation for extending utilities to the Flanders Road industrial area, which is to define a route that will open up the most developable land possible.

Councilor O'Beirne noted the Town's and State's sewer avoidance and/or conservation area designations that encumber most of the business park area. Mr. Murphy noted that the southern area of the park is the area that will provide development opportunities. Councilor O'Beirne further noted that there is developable land with available utilities on Route 117 that is not even

mentioned in the plan. Discussion followed on the industrially zoned property, utility extension, etc. The Town Manager explained that there are many developers interested in the Route 117 property, but the property owners have not been motivated. The Economic/Strategic Plan attempts to rank projects. Councilor O'Beirne suggested that if the Town extends utilities on Flanders Road, it should enter into some sort of partnership with the property owners to assure development.

Mr. Murphy summarized by noting that there is no quick fix in Groton. The lack of developable land is a constraint. Public investment is going to be the impetus.

2003-0198 Public Water & Sewer on Flanders Road/Industrial area

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger reminded the Council that this referral was placed on hold pending completion of the Economic/Strategic Plan. It was suggested that the Council hold a work session to discuss this issue.

2006-0007 Legislative Policy (2006 Standing Referral)

Discussed

Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent distributed and reviewed a draft of CCM's Preliminary 2007 State Legislative Priorities.

Councilor O'Beirne asked that property revaluation be added to the list for review.

Councilor Wright arrived at 7:05 p.m.

A meeting with State legislators was tentatively scheduled for December 5th.

Town Manager Oefinger asked that any other legislative items be forwarded to him prior to the meeting. Mayor Watson asked that a local hotel tax be discussed.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Scott, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright
Members Absent: Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond and Councilor Streeter

2006-0063 Bus Ordinance Amendment

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted staff will be assisting the parties in choosing another mediator.

2006-0100 Thames Street Rehabilitation Study

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted that interested parties have met to discuss the next level of design investigation, and there may be additional information available at the December 4th joint meeting with the City Council.

2006-0195 Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief

Tabled

2006-0222 Elderly Tax Freeze Legislation

Tabled

2006-0239 Animal Shelter

Discussed

Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted that staff has reviewed websites, newspaper articles, etc. and found four animal shelters built or proposed to be built since 2003. He reviewed the sizes and costs of the facilities. Staff also looked for a company that does shelters nationwide.

There are modular kennels, but they are designed for working dogs, not the "clawers" or "chewers" that an animal shelter sees. Still the facility would be in the \$600,000 range. The Town has the site and utilities and estimates that 16 runs would cost approximately \$775,000. It would cost \$75,000 to prepare plans and specifications.

Councilor Sheets expressed concern with the numbers. Discussion followed on the cost of plan preparation. Mr. Schneider noted that the next step could be to value engineer something if possible. Although Public Works could do the site work, they can not build the building. Major work requires that the building be brought up to current code.

Councilor Wright yielded the floor to Mr. Noel, North Street, Groton Long Point. Mr. Noel suggested using rockboard instead of sheetrock and paying a plumber for only the time worked. He stated that he toured the dog pound, and he would like to draw up an idea to present to the Council. He suggested one heated area for dogs instead of the whole floor. Mr. Noel also suggested contracting the service out to a local kennel and having a separate building for cats.

Councilor Sheets yielded the floor to Mariellen French. Ms. French, 12 Little Gull Lane, distributed and read her comments regarding an animal shelter.

Councilor Wright noted that many people have expressed a willingness to contribute to a fund to construct an animal shelter. She suggested that the Town consider a mix of funding sources including bonding, capital reserve, and private solicitation. Councilor Kolnaski noted that the referendum process should be started and any donations can be applied later. Councilor O'Beirne suggested that the Town Manager prepare for a referendum for a bond augmented by a reasonable amount from capital reserve funds (\$300,000-\$400,000).

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution starting the bond ordinance process.

Town Manager Oefinger suggested that at a minimum it would be good to go to the design development stage since the plan will have to be presented to the public and it will be necessary to have a better cost estimate. The motion and second were withdrawn.

2006-0239 Animal Shelter

A motion was made by Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution to allow an additional level of design development, which will require a supplemental appropriation.

The motion carried unanimously

The Committee recessed at 8:04 p.m. and reconvened at 8:13 p.m.

2006-0280 Signage on Private Property

Recommended for Deletion

Staff has made an inquiry to CCM on this issue, but has not yet received a response. Town Manager Oefinger provided background information on this issue and stated the Town is not in a position to be private property sign police. Councilor Kolnaski suggested this is a civil issue and not an issue for the Council. The referral was recommended for deletion by consensus.

2006-0282 School Improvement Project - Phase II

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger suggested it is time to start thinking about Phase II of the school improvement project. There are funds in the CIP to hire a consultant. The Council should consider establishing another School Design Committee.

2006-0282 School Improvement Project - Phase II

establishing an oversight committee for Phase II of the School Improvement Program.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0273 Adoption of 2007 Group I Regular Meeting Schedule

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0274 Adoption of 2007 Group II Regular Meeting Schedule

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0275 Adoption of 2007 Committee of the Whole Regular Meeting Schedule

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0276 Adoption of 2007 Town Council Regular Meeting Schedule

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0277 Grant for Holiday DUI Enforcement

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0281 SI Financial Group Foundation Grant - Tercentennial Legacy Playground

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0287 Moratorium on Active Senior Housing Developments

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger provided a handout and explained that a moratorium is actually a zoning regulation, which means the Council has no authority to enact one. He also provided a handout on the genesis of zoning regulation.

2006-0288 Revaluation Phase In - Option 2

Recommended for Deletion

Sal Pandolfo, Director of Finance, and John Philip, Assessor, discussed "option 2" of the revaluation phase in. Mr. Philip explained that this is existing law that phases in the assessment ratio which is 70% at the time of revaluation. The beginning point is the sales ratio at the time of revaluation; the ending point is 70%. There are three or five year phase in options. Mr. Philip noted there is a large potential for unintended consequences for properties whose value did not rise very much.

Mr. Philip noted the changes between the 2004 assessments and the proposed 2005 revaluation assessments broke down as follows:

<25% increase - 649 houses, or 8%

26-50% increase - 958 houses, or 13%

51-75% increase - 4,026 houses, or 53%

76-100% increase - 1,630 houses, or 21%

>100% increase - 401 houses, or 5%

The median percentage increase for condominiums was 98%

Mr. Pandolfo provided an analysis of full implementation of the revaluation versus three and five year phase in for five residential properties and four commercial/industrial properties. He noted that lost real estate revenues would have to be made up by Personal Property and Motor Vehicles.

Councilor O'Beirne noted that the savings to residents of a phase in is miniscule. Mr. Philip spoke with representatives of the City of Danbury, which just completed a phase in. The phase in resulted in a tremendous amount of confusion for anyone dealing with assessments and property values. Two other communities have just started phase in and do not have any experience yet with the process.

Discussion followed on the tax impact on a "typical" family that escrows their real estate taxes and that would see a significant increase in motor vehicle taxes.

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski to not phase in the revaluation.

Discussion followed and the motion and second were withdrawn.

2006-0288

Revaluation Phase In - Option 2

A motion was made by Councilor Scott, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to delete this referral.

Councilor Sheets asked Councilors to state their positions and Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, and Councilor O'Beirne stated they are opposed to phase in. Councilor Sheets stated she supports phase in and expressed her concerns with the tax system. She feels an obligation to temper the impact of revaluation. Councilor O'Beirne noted that taxpayers will not save a significant amount of money. Councilor Wright feels this option benefits all ranges of properties. Councilor Scott spoke for small businesses that do not own their own buildings, noting that it is difficult to do business in the State of Connecticut as it is without raising personal property taxes.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 4 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Scott
Opposed: 2 - Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright

2004-0233

Updating the Build Out and Fiscal Impact Analyses

Discussed

Councilor Wright suggested the Council should look at impacts on the watershed and undertake build out and fiscal impact analyses under current zoning. She suggested that GIS might be capable of those types of analyses but the Town Manager noted it is not. He added that a build out analysis was conducted with the 2002 POCD and he would provide that information to the Council.

2006-0198

Town Manager Annual Evaluation

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Scott, to enter executive session at 9:38 p.m. to discuss 2006-0198 Town Manager Annual Evaluation.

The motion carried unanimously

2006-0198

Town Manager Annual Evaluation

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 10:01 p.m.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

2006-0080 Review of SCCOG Items by Town Council
Recommended for Deletion

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:01 p.m.